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# Fact Sheet

For Potential  
Farmers

AFS-1-1-2



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Office of  
Governmental  
and Public Affairs

## Should You Try Farming?

Perhaps you have long thought about moving to a farm and wonder whether it's really the right life for you and your family. Or maybe you once lived on a farm and are thinking of going back. Or maybe you're a young person starting out and are intrigued with the possibilities of life on a farm.

The questions on this and the following pages will help you decide whether farm life is right for you. The purpose of the questionnaire is not to give you a particular "score," but rather to cover some of the realities of farming today. The questions will give you some guidance as you search for more information. They should help you find areas where you need additional data.

If you can answer "yes" to most of the questions, then you probably will have a fairly good chance of success in farming, but of course you will want to gather many more facts before you proceed further.

It usually is advisable to consult several different experts, including USDA agencies' representatives; seed, fertilizer, and implement dealers; bankers; farmer cooperative officials, and others before you commit yourself to a major action, such as buying land.

If you truthfully answer "no," or "undecided," or "don't know" to most of the questions, then you probably shouldn't think about moving to a farm unless you are motivated by strong personal reasons. If you are strongly motivated, you will want to prepare yourself thoroughly by getting answers to appropriate questions. You'll find some suggestions on the last page about where to look or write for help.

### Basic Decision Questions

1. Have you determined whether you want to farm full time or part time?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

2. Do you plan to start farming with an established farmer, either in a partnership, in a closely held corporation, or, if you have no prior experience, as a farm hand or manager-trainee?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

### Financial Questions

3. Have you chosen a farm location suited to your family, and found out the rental charge per acre or how much land costs if you want to buy it?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

4. If you want to farm full time, can you get from \$250,000 to \$350,000 in loans and other assets—or if you want to farm part time, can you raise \$100,000 or more, or raise somewhat less money and start off more slowly and work your way up?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ don't know \_\_\_\_

5. If you have a farm picked out, do you know how much property taxes you would have to pay, how well the road is maintained between the farm and nearest shopping center, the cost and quality of other local government services, and whether costly new local government facilities are planned which might increase your real estate taxes?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ don't know \_\_\_\_

6. If you will be living on a retirement income, will it support you on the farm in case you make no net profits from farming?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ don't know \_\_\_\_

7. If you want to do less than full-time farming, are you willing to take an extra part-time job at prevailing rural pay rates as a way to make ends meet, assuming you do not have a steady income from other sources?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

8. Assuming a "normal" farm year, have you made out a budget of your expected sales, farming expenses, family living expenses, and net farm income, and found that you can make out all right on farm income and income from other sources?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

9. Have you looked ahead to when you might leave farming, and have you thought about related tax matters, such as capital gains and/or inheritance taxes?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

### Personal/Management Questions

10. Are you flexible and "tough" enough so you don't mind taking risks with your own money?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

11. Are you a "self-starter," and can you plan and do your own work on schedule?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

12. Are you able to get members of your family interested in working together at chores or special projects, and can you comfortably direct the work of others whose help you may need from time to time?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

13. Can you say you like to work with your hands and don't mind physical work outdoors in all kinds of weather?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ don't know \_\_\_\_

14. Are you looking forward to farming to get away from indoor confinement, busy offices and crowds, and city noises and smog—in exchange for other kinds of problems such as greater isolation and distance from facilities?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

15. Have you observed that, despite its placid image, farming is a very stressful business because the farmer is self-employed and is under pressure to keep up with the work and cope with constant changes in weather, market conditions, technology, and uncertainty of income?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

16. Are you aware farming is among the most dangerous occupations, along with mining and construction, according to the National Safety Council?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

17. Have you thought about health care, and do you know how close you would be on the farm to the nearest family doctor or medical specialist, dentist, first-aid station, ambulance service, hospital, or mental health counselor?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

18. Are you ready for the social life of country living, which may include fewer, or different, recreational and social events than the city?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

19. Would you enjoy getting involved in farm community activities, and do you know about your prospective locality's civic organizations, religious groups, 4-H clubs, service clubs, extension homemakers' clubs, or other groups you might find interesting?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ don't know \_\_\_\_

20. Do you have mechanical ability and like doing odd jobs around your home, such as fixing faucets or a broken water pipe, doing carpentry work, painting, replacing rusted-out gutters, or laying or repairing concrete?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

21. If you plan to produce your own milk or maintain poultry or livestock, have you considered that you must be at home for the milking and/or feeding chores twice a day, 7 days a week, month after month and that it often isn't easy to find someone to relieve you on short notice unless you have relatives close by?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

22. In case you plan to grow and sell specialty crops such as bell peppers, cabbage, or sweet corn, do you appreciate the crucial importance of having your market thoroughly thought out before you begin planting?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

23. Have you had what you feel is enough on-farm experience similar to the work on the type of farm you plan to operate?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

24. If you plan to raise livestock or poultry, are you aware of the manure disposal and runoff problems in the farming area you have in mind?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

25. Would you be able to handle the stress of replanting your major crop after a killer frost or rebuilding your herd or flock if it is "wiped out" by a disease?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

### Miscellaneous Questions About Things You May Need To Know

26. Have you studied the farm area where you plan to live and know which kind of farming it would best support, or do you have a kind of farming in mind and plan to look in different States for the best location?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

27. Have you evaluated common types of farming such as some of those listed here to see how they match up with your family goals and capabilities: tree fruits, vegetables, broilers or turkeys, layer hens, dairy cows, sows with farrow-to-finish pigs, feeder pigs, beef feeding, beef cows, sheep flock, corn/soybeans, wheat, rice, cotton, tobacco, peanuts, or other crops such as trees, melons, sweet corn, ornamental plants, or others?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

28. Would you enjoy getting technical farming advice from others, and know how to get advice from specialists such as county extension agents, entomologists, pesticide applicators, soil scientists, fertilizer experts, conservationists, engineers, and others?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

29. Would you enjoy shopping around to get the best price and make the best deal for fertilizer, fuels, feed, seed, and equipment?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

30. Do you know something about market reports and would you enjoy searching out the best markets to sell your farm products?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

31. Do you know the meaning of these initials: USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) and its agencies, such as, ASCS (Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service), CCC (Commodity Credit Corporation), FCIC (Federal Crop Insurance Corporation), ACS (Agricultural Cooperative Service), ESS (Economics and Statistics Service), SCS (Soil Conservation Service), REA (Rural Electrification Administration), FmHA (Farmers Home Administration), SEA (Science and Education Administration), and various non-USDA agencies such as SBA (Small Business Administration)? And do you know what each might have to do with your selected or potential farm operation?

no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_



32. If you need help on your farm, do you think you can hire farmworkers and do you know whether custom hiring services are available?  
no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ undecided \_\_\_\_

33. If you need to hire farmworkers, are you familiar with State and Federal laws concerning the safety and well-being of your employees, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Hazardous Occupations Law, Social Security Tax Law, Federal Minimum Wage Law and Workmen's Compensation Laws?  
no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

34. Do you know that a farm employer can be held liable for negligent acts of his or her employees and that you are liable for your own negligence regarding the safety and health of your employees?  
no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

35. If you are going to raise livestock, are you aware of the need for, and the cost of, a good fence of the type your neighbors are likely to insist upon?  
no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

36. With increasing needs for fuel conservation, do you have information on how to apply the best conservation measures in managing farm equipment?  
no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

37. Are you familiar with State laws dealing with the abatement, prevention, and policing of air pollution; and do you know that court injunctions and daily fines may be imposed on farmers who violate court orders against pollution?  
no \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_

### How Many "Yes" Answers?

How many "yes" answers did you score? \_\_\_\_\_. If you scored a large majority as "yes," especially under the financial category, congratulations on having a moderate chance for a successful farming career.

For answers to those questions where you answered "no," or "don't know," or "undecided," you probably need to go over this questionnaire with an experienced farmer, a farm banker, a management specialist, or a county agent at the county office of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES). The Extension office usually is located at the county seat in the post office, the courthouse, or in a building shared by other USDA agencies. County Extension offices are listed in the telephone book under the name of the land-grant university in a State, or as Cooperative or Agricultural Extension Service under the name of any county.

People at those offices may be able to give you pointers to help you find more definite answers to questions and reach a sound decision on whether to try farming.

If you checked "yes" on the questions that obviously pertain to part-time farming, and had quite a number of "yes" answers elsewhere, then perhaps you would be successful at part-time farming. There are books—such as

**Living On A Few Acres**, the 1978 Yearbook of Agriculture published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture—and other publications to give you further information on that topic. That Yearbook of Agriculture is available for \$7 from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. When ordering specify No. 001-000-03809-5.

In any case, if your county Extension agent and you and your family believe you have enough positive answers to proceed further, you will want to study other material that you get from your county Extension agent. That office will have USDA and State publications that will help you learn more about farming and will have a listing of others obtainable elsewhere.

One two-page fact sheet (AFS 1-1-1) that your county agent may have is called "A Buyer's Guide for Evaluating Small Acreages." Including check lists, it will be useful in supplementing this questionnaire.

Your Extension agent also will be able to provide further leads on getting more information, and can direct you to various USDA offices for additional useful advice. The agent can give you addresses of these USDA agencies:

**The Soil Conservation Service (SCS)** can help you find out what your land and water resources are like, how to protect them, and how to improve them so as to grow better crops, support more wildlife, boost the supply and quality of water, and produce more income.

**The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA)** makes loans and grants to eligible farm and nonfarm families in rural areas, including towns, for housing, farming, and community facilities. FmHA county supervisors also make improvement loans to bring existing houses to a standard of adequacy, including the installation of wells, waste disposal facilities, and inside plumbing. FmHA loans are available only to families of low and moderate income who cannot obtain conventional credit from non-government outlets.

**The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS)** is represented by officials who can answer questions about who may take part in Federal farm programs, cost-sharing assistance for soil and water conservation practices, and loans for grain storage facilities.

**The Forest Service (FS)** can assist forestland owners in developing management plans and in marketing forest products, working through the 50 individual State forestry departments.

Meanwhile, the North Central Extension Farm Management Committee, in cooperation with State Extension agencies and USDA, has issued five useful publications: **Getting Started in Farming** (No. 81), **Mostly On Your Own** (No. 82), **Part-Time or Small Farms** (No. 83), **Via the Home Farm** (No. 84), and **So You Have Inherited a Farm** (No. 85). Single copies only are available at 50 cents each from Extension Publications, 206 Whitten Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo. 65211.

USDA also has a bibliography entitled **Small Farms, Family and Part-Time Farming in the United States**.

which may be obtained by writing to Reference Branch, Technical Information Systems, Science and Education Administration, National Agricultural Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Beltsville, Md. 20705.

Finally, the 1980 Yearbook of Agriculture, **Cutting Energy Costs**, also contains material designed for use by farm operators. It may be bought by sending a check or money order for \$9.50 to Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Members of Congress have limited allotments of the book for free distribution to constituents. USDA has no copies for free distribution or for sale.